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the work
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SPAIN'S LEGACY

By W. GEORGE LOVELL

'Throughout history Spain has repeatedly charged itself with a mission to defend Christianity against non-Christian forces. Church and state, the cross and the sword, were always considered complementary tools of authority by an expansionist Spanish monarchy'

We're good forgetters. That's how we got our own back on Franco. We forgot him.

— An unnamed Spanish intellectual quoted in The New Yorker, Nov. 1, 1982

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

— George Santayana

A SUMMER IN Spain is an experience most people interested in other lands and cultures would find enriching and rewarding. To a Latin Americanist, particularly one primarily interested in the colonial experience of Spain's former New World possessions, a visit to the mother country is a chance to observe and reflect upon the source of certain mores that have shaped, and continue to shape, the way of life of some 300 million Spanish-speaking people between the Rio Grande and Tierra del Fuego.

There is no more fitting a place to begin contemplation of the impact of Spain in America than Seville, or Sevilla as the Spaniards themselves call it. The capital of the southern province of Andalusia, Sevilla is a city whose beauty and charm have long defied poetic description. In a popular lyric evoking the essence of Andalusian place names, the poet Manuel Machado found no words could suffice for Sevilla:

Cádiz, salt-laden brightness.

Granada, hidden waters that weep.

Roman and Moorish, silent Córdoba.

Málaga, singer of flamenco.

Almería the golden.

Silvery Jaén.

Huelva, the shore of the three caravels [of Columbus].

And Sevilla.

In 1992 Sevilla hopes to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Columbus' successful trans-Atlantic voyage by being host to a major world fair. The city is certainly an appropriate choice for the staging of such an event, for it was from Sevilla, a port on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, that countless expeditions first set out for the New World. In the centre of the city, lying between the imposing walls of a Moorish palace and the massive grace of a Gothic cathedral, stands a building in which an inexhaustible record of Spanish colonial rule in the Americas has been stored for posterity. The *Archivo General de Indias* (the Archive of the Indies) and its voluminous contents provide many important insights into the operation of imperial Spain.

For all its faults and excesses (and, like all societies, it had many), imperial Spain did not fail to instill its workforce with an administrative and legalistic mentality unequalled by any other European nation during the great age of exploration. Nowhere is the bureaucratic mind of Spain in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries better exemplified than in the vast documentation housed in the Archive of the Indies.

The sheer number of documents maintained in the repository is simply staggering. Sixteen different geographic and thematic sections compose the archive, containing approximately 39,000 bundles of documents known as *legajos*. It is conservatively estimated that these *legajos* in total

contain about 14 million folio size (31 x 22 cm) sheets of paper. A guide to the archive proudly proclaims that if the contents of every *legajo* were laid out in a row, side by side, the paper chain they form would stretch from San Francisco in California to the city of Valdivia in Chile, from the northern frontier to the southern frontier of what historian J.H. Parry called "the Spanish seaborne empire," a distance of some 8,680 kilometres.

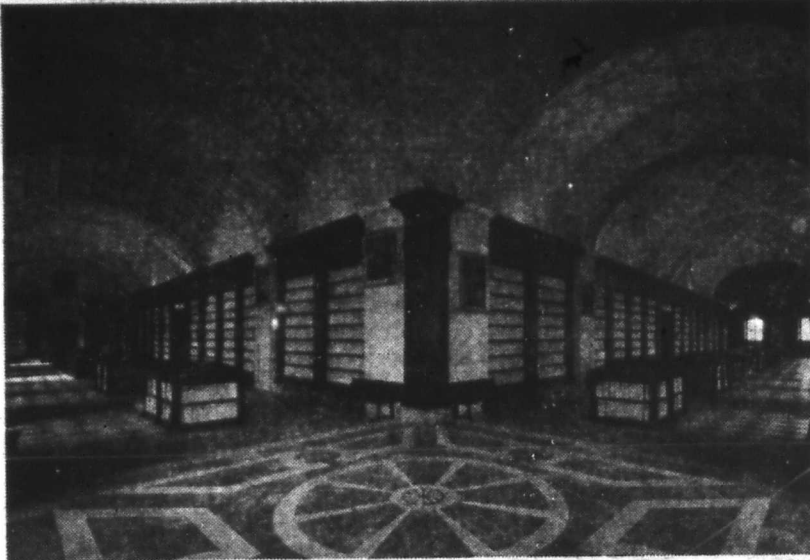
The several hundred folios which form a *legajo* contain detailed and often labyrinthine information on all aspects of life in Spain's American colonies and reveal, often quite dramatically, the extent to which the state sought to control and to monitor every conceivable facet of existence. Tribute lists and population counts, tax records and agricultural reports, notices of import and export duties, royal orders and decrees stipulating the procedures which should be followed when founding a town, when constructing a road, when building a church, when exploiting a mine, or when nursing the sick back to health after an outbreak of disease: all these activities, and countless others, the small and mundane as well as the noble and inspiring, were astutely recorded by parish priests, distinct governors, army captains, land surveyors, doctors, lawyers, accountants and myriad Crown officials. Their diligence and dedication in the centuries past now make possible all sorts of historical inquiries.

Paleography (the study and interpretation of ancient documents) is a discipline that entails long, tedious hours of work, but it can also be exciting and satisfying and sometimes yields surprises. My research in the Seville archive last summer was especially exciting and fruitful.

One day, sifting through a *legajo* containing estimates of the size of the Indian population of Guatemala in the mid-16th century, I discovered a handful of folios which belonged — the script in which they were written showed — to a period earlier in the century. My curiosity aroused; I began to read the documents more carefully; and was rewarded well beyond my expectations.

The "discovery" — confirmed by a fellow Canadian researcher — turned out to be fragments of the earliest recorded *tasaciones*, or tribute assessments, for a half-dozen or so Indian towns in Guatemala, *tasaciones* known to have been undertaken some time in the 1530s but long considered by most scholars to have been lost. I had actually searched, in vain, for these same *tasaciones* a few years ago in Guatemalan archives.

Spanish imperial policy dictated that Crown officials always write out at least two copies of every item of correspondence, one to be kept in the colony, the other to be sent to the so-



The Archivo General de Indias in Seville: linking the old world with the new

vereign and the Council of the Indies in Spain. Since the copy of these first *tasaciones* which remained in Guatemala has apparently disappeared (due to the high incidence there of any number of hazards, including flood, fire, earthquake, negligence or theft), the only hope of their ever being located was in Spain. The luck involved in unexpectedly coming across the *tasaciones* in Seville is made even greater by the fact that they were tucked inside a *legajo* deposited in an almost unclassified, miscellaneous section of the archive known as *indiferente general*.

THRILLS SUCH as this one more than compensate for the whims of the often temperamental archive staff or the days of drudgery and frustration spent deciphering a document written in an appalling hand, to say nothing of the suffocating heat which can make life in Seville almost unbearable in July and August.

Mercifully, in a city and a people which do not always recognize the appropriateness or worth of 20th-century technology, the archive administration has conceded that there is a need during the hot summer months for some rudimentary air-conditioning, so the archive building has been adapted accordingly. (Prior to the advent of air-conditioning, the archive simply shut its doors during the torrid days of August.)

Adapting to new needs is something the archive building has already experienced, because it was not erected as a repository for documents in the first place. Constructed be-

tween 1584 and 1598 to a design by Juan de Herrera, who was also the architect responsible for Philip the Second's monastery-palace of El Escorial, the building originally functioned as a *Casa de Contratación*, or House of Exchange.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, since the merchants of Sevilla were granted an almost total monopoly of Spanish trade with the New World, the *Casa de Contratación* was a vibrant and important institution with a prominent role to play in the economic life both of the mother country and its American colonies. Because the fortunes of Sevilla were directly linked to the city's key function in trans-Atlantic commerce, its well-being suffered considerably in 1717 when, owing to the silting-up of the Guadalquivir River, the trade monopoly with the Indies was revoked and granted to the rival port of Cádiz. Naturally, the operation of the *Casa de Contratación* shifted also to Cádiz, leaving Sevilla with a beautiful, but redundant, public building.

By 1785, after more than half a century of indecision, Juan de Herrera's exchange house was given a new function by the Spanish government, one that not only would endure but would also assign to Sevilla full recognition of the part it played for two centuries in Spain's overseas expansion: the building would become the permanent storage space for papers in the state's possession that relate to its New World ventures, hence the designation *Archivo General de Indias*. In the autumn of 1785 the relevant documents were moved overland from the royal

archive at Simancas (near Valladolid) to Sevilla: The transfer of *los papeles indianos*, the Indies papers, required two cumbersome expeditions involving approximately a dozen wagon-loads each. *Los papeles indianos* have remained in Seville ever since, and each year attract thousands of researchers from all over the world.

Although the operation of the Archive of the Indies gives the city a direct link with the colonial experience of Latin America, there are other features of land and life in Sevilla, Andalusia and Spain in general which connect the mother country and its American offspring.

Religion, specifically the practice of Roman Catholicism and the observance of certain moral standards it promotes and upholds, is a notable element of the shared culture linking Spain and Latin America,

and reinforced by recent visits to both parts of the world by Pope John Paul II. Throughout history Spain has repeatedly charged itself with a mission to defend Christianity against the encroachment of non-Christian forces inevitably perceived as evil, heathen and worthy only of being deposed; church and state, the cross and the sword, were always considered complementary tools of authority by an expansionist Spanish monarchy. The most renowned example of this alignment was the Inquisition, the fearful court set up by Queen Isabel in Castile in 1478 and subsequently instituted throughout Spain and its New World possessions as a means of examining, and ultimately "reforming," all those perceived in some way to be spiritually impure, whether Jew, Moor, Protestant or pagan Amerindian.

Both in the protracted ouster of the Moors from Andalusia and in the much more rapid overthrow of the Aztec, Maya and Inca domains in the Americas, the notion of conquest as being spiritually desirable was one which propelled Spaniards, frequently in the face of great adversity, to almost super-human efforts. After subjugation of the infidel (which carried with it marked economic and political gains in addition to spiritual ones) there was little room for religious tolerance. Convinced of its spiritual superiority as well as its proven military might, Spain sought to dismantle and, if possible, obliterate all vestiges of pre-conquest religions: cathedrals and churches were often built on top of, or adjacent to, structures which in pre-Christian times had been revered places of worship. In this way conquest was given both a symbolic and physical manifestation.

Perhaps the best Andalusian example of such spiritual conquest is at Córdoba, an ancient seat of learning which lies to the east of Sevilla in the heart of the Guadalquivir Valley. Here the victorious Christians, blind

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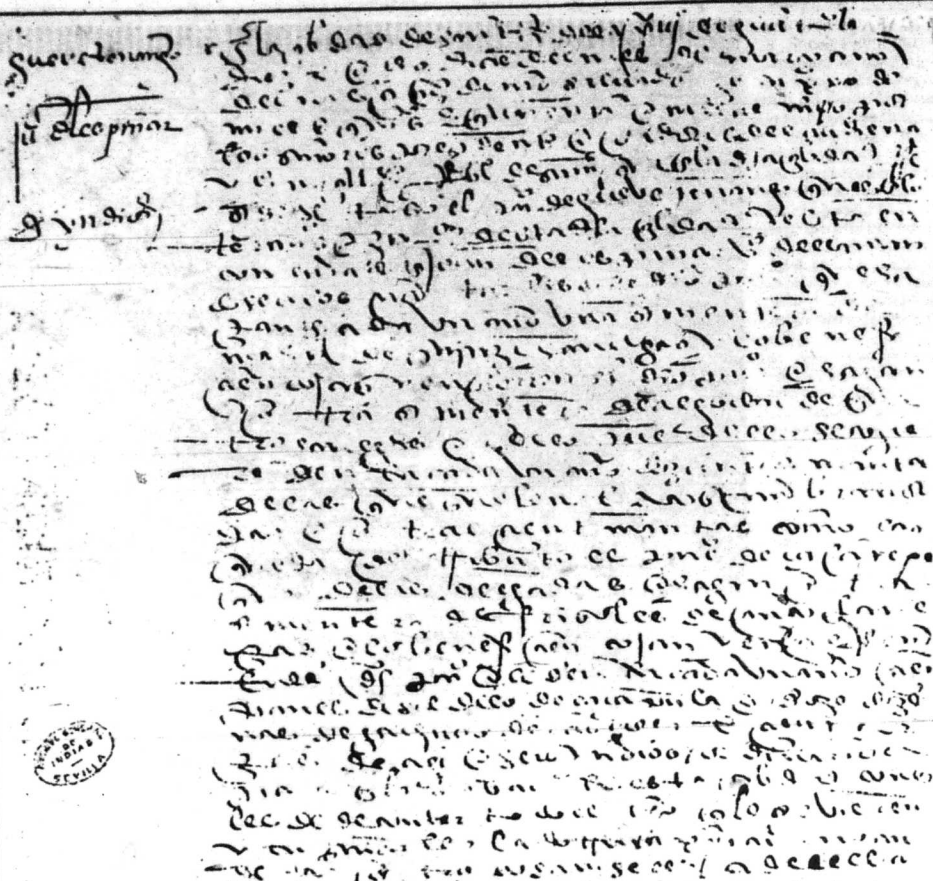
to the virtues of an artistic expression not of their faith, superimposed a Roman Catholic Cathedral over a Moorish mosque in an act of cultural vandalism as destructive and intolerant as one is ever likely to find. (King Charles the Fifth, one of Spain's more enlightened monarchs, was later to lament to the clergy of Córdoba: "You have destroyed something unique to build something commonplace.")

In the New World, there is a striking example of the same mentality at the Mexican town of Cholula, where defeat of the Indian communities of the Valley of Puebla by 16th-century conquistadores was celebrated by erecting, on top of the largest pre-Columbian pyramid in Mesoamerica, a church dedicated to the cult of the Virgin Mary. In the context of Spanish imperial desires, Córdoba and Cholula may thus be viewed as examples of the historical supremacy of Roman Catholicism, for the people of the subjugated lands have lived with the religion of their conquerors ever since.

IF THE PEOPLE of Spain and Latin America share a common set of religious beliefs, so also are they united in certain aspects of their economic, social and political life. Some representatives of the media covering events in war-torn El Salvador and Guatemala now seek to explain the roots of the current turmoil in Central America not in terms of an "international communist conspiracy" but, more realistically, in terms of an impoverished but politicized peasantry fighting against deprivation, inequality, injustice and the total domination of their lives by a powerful and wealthy elite. For instance, we hear and read of Central American oligarchies like *los catorce*, the "fourteen families" who own and operate the vast majority of El Salvador's productive resources, families who (along with the armed forces spawned to protect their vested interests) preside over the local political scene and who in no way wish to see their almost feudal society undergo any kind of egalitarian change, be it land reform, income redistribution or programs of nationalization.

Members of the Spanish oligarchy, such as the Domeca family of Andalusia, do not exert quite so dramatic a hold over the national economy as do their counterparts in El Salvador or Guatemala, but their hold is still significant. Agricultural reform in Spain has been retarded by the ultra-conservatism of landowners like the Domecas, whose rural properties, which account for only two per cent of all farm holdings, cover almost half the nation's arable land. As in Latin America, many landed estates in Spain, especially in Andalusia, produce not for the domestic market but for external consumption: grapes for wine, sherry and brandy; olives for cooking oil; and a variety of winter-grown fruit and vegetables for the teeming urban centres of northern Europe.

With an emphasis on this type of production, Spain, long regarded by economists as an agricultural nation,



A mid 16th-century 'tasación,' or tribute assessment for Huehuetenango, Guatemala, detailing the goods and services the Indians of the town should pay Spanish conquistador Juan de Espinar (from the Archivo General de Indias)

is now forced to import large amounts of basic foodstuffs such as meat, milk and eggs; the nation today actually has an adverse agricultural trade balance, much like many Latin American countries. What they have in common is not that the land available for cultivation is insufficient or unproductive, for this is simply not the case. Rather, land is traditionally held in a few privileged hands and is used not to feed malnourished or undernourished local populations, but to grow commercial crops for export and sale abroad. Moreover, agricultural labor is often distinctly seasonal in character, meaning that for several months of each year there is no work available, a condition that either forces workers to abandon their local communities or accept chronic underemployment as a fact of life.

Rural poverty in Spain, particularly in Andalusia, thus has a similar origin to that of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru: it is a direct function of a certain kind of political structure and economic orientation. Just as attempts to change such realities in Latin America are opposed by ruling elites and result, with each passing day, in ever more bloody and violent confrontations, so also did moves to replace the old order with a new one in Spain in the 1930s precipitate a

brutal civil war, the memory of which still scars and divides the nation.

Because they share many similar cultural and historical experiences, it would be heartening to think that Latin America, in trying to come to terms with contemporary problems rooted deep in the past, could learn from recent developments in Spain. Since the death of General Francisco Franco seven years ago, the country has embarked on a shaky democratic course, one that has constantly had to withstand political sabotage from a right-wing military which considers itself the trusted keeper of Spanish destiny and which wishes to perpetuate the vision of the old dictator.

The message *Franco presente*, "Franco is still with us," is scrawled on walls in Spain; it remains a slogan of the army high command and various fascist nationalists. While the armed forces, as witnessed by the abortive coup of February 23, 1981, simply cannot be relied upon to respect or support the principles of democracy, certain establishment figures, most notably King Juan Carlos, encourage a quiet optimism that progressive thinking may yet forge a new Spain. A convincing socialist victory in provincial elections in Andalusia in May was a harbinger of a national sweep of the polls in October

by the socialists under the leadership of Felipe González, a native of Seville. The future may be uncertain, but at least it will be approached in a different and more socially responsible way by a government which enjoys an absolute majority in the Cortes (Spanish parliament).

Whether or not the inhabitants wanted it in the first place, Latin America today has an Hispanic heritage dating back to the Spanish domination of the New World in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. The manifestations of this former domination continue to be seen in various aspects of Latin American culture, in language, in religion and in economic, social and political life. Spain has recently demonstrated to the rest of the world that the work of tyrants can be undone, that the repressive 40-year aftermath of a bitter civil war can be replaced by something more decent and acceptable. Having already derived so much from the mother country, perhaps the nations of Latin America will one day view Spain's current experiment with the democratic process, precarious though it is, as an appropriate course of action for them too. □

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